

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 11434

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: CONDITIONS IN OUTLYING AREAS: REPORTEDLY BAD AND GETTING WORSE

1. SUMMARY. REPORTS BY SOVIET ACQUAINTANCES WHO RECENTLY RETURNED TO MOSCOW FROM OUTLYING AREAS PAINT A DISMAL, ALBEIT INCOMPLETE, PICTURE OF DECAY, STAGNATION, AND A BAD FOOD SITUATION GETTING WORSE. ALTHOUGH MOSCOW CONTINUES TO ENJOY A PRIVILEGED STATUS

EVEN HERE SUMMER HAS NOT BROUGHT THE CUSTOMARY SEASONAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE AVAILABILITY OF FOOD. THE COMPLAINTS WE HEAR ARE PERSISTENT, BITTER--AND THEY STRESS THAT THE SITUATION IS FAR WORSE THAN APPEARS ON THE SURFACE. SOME CONSIDER FOOD RATIONING TO BE INEVITABLE. WE HAVE HEARD ONE RUMOR OF AN IMPENDING 30 PERCENT INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF MEAT. END SUMMARY.

2. MOSCOW OBLAST: TWO "BABUSKI" PICKED UP BY AN EMBWIFE ON JULY 17 NEAR THE DIPLOMATIC BEACH AT USPENSKOYE GOING INTO MOSCOW TO SELL FLOWERS SAID THAT THERE WAS NOTHING AVAILABLE IN LOCAL STORES, ESPECIALLY NO MEAT. ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS, THE LOCAL POTATO CROP IS ROTTING IN THE FIELDS BECAUSE OF THE UNSEASONABLY COLD WET WEATHER. SUMMER PRODUCE IS AVAILABLE FOR HIGH PRICES IN THE "RYNOKS," BUT THERE ARE FEW VEGETABLES IN STATE STORES.

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MOSCOW RESIDENTS WHO RENT PEASANT CABINS IN SURROUNDING VILLAGES

COMPLAIN THAT NORMAL SUMMER PRODUCE IS SIMPLY NOT AVAILABLE. SOME VOICE INDIGNATION THAT IN A PERIOD OF SEVERE SHORTAGES, THEY CANNOT EVEN LEGALLY CULTIVATE SMALL VEGETABLE GARDENS AROUND THEIR CABINS BECAUSE THEY ARE REGISTERED AS OFFICIAL RESIDENTS OF THE VILLAGE (THEY DO, ANYWAY). HOWEVER, THE FLIGHT OF THE RURAL POPULATION FROM THE LAND HAS MADE IT EASY AND CHEAP TO RENT PEASANT HOMES FOR THE SUMMER. WE HEARD ONE RUMOR OF AN IMPENDING 30 PERCENT PRICE INCREASE ON MEAT, AS WELL AS PRICE HIKES ON DAIRY PRODUCTS.

3. KALUGA OBLAST': ACCORDING TO AN UNOFFICIAL ARTIST WHO SPENT LAST WEEK AT HIS PARENTS' DACHA IN TARUSA, AN ARTIST COMMUNITY, THERE IS ALMOST NOTHING TO BUY LOCALLY. STORES HAVE NOT HAD MEAT IN MONTHS; THE POTATO CROP WAS DESTROYED BY COLORADO BEETLES; LOCAL STORES LIMIT PURCHASES OF SUGAR TO ONE KILO AND TEA/ COFFEE TO HALF A KILO. DRIED FISH AND CANNED PRESERVES ARE THE ONLY FOOD ITEMS READILY AVAILABLE.

4. ALTAY KRAY: THE SAME ARTIST REPORTS THAT A CENTRAL COMMITTEE WORKER WHO WAS RECRUITING ARTIST TO GO ON A FREE "VACATION" TRIP TO ALTAY ADVISED THEM TO BRING "EVERYTHING", INCLUDING SOAP AND TEA, BECAUSE NOTHING IS AVAILABLE LOCALLY. ANOTHER SOURCE-- AN ACTOR WHO WENT TO BARNAIL (ALTAY KRAY) ON TOUR WITH HIS THEATRICAL COMPANY--DESCRIBES CONDITIONS THERE AS SHOCKING, WITH STAPLES IN SHORT SUPPLY, NO MEAT, AND VERY FEW VEGETABLES. IN ORDER TO SUBSIST ON AN INADEQUATE 2.50 RUBLE PER DIEM, THE ACTORS WORKED OUT AN ARRANGEMENT WITH A LOCAL "STOLOVAYA" TO PROVIDE THEM WITH A SLIGHTLY IMPROVED MENU (I.E., WITH A LITTLE MEAT) AT A SPECIAL HOUR WHEN THE FACILITY WOULD BE CLOSED TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC. HE EXPRESSED MORTIFICATION AND SHAME THAT THE ACTORS HAD TO TAKE TURNS AT THE DOOR TO KEEP OTHER CUSTOMERS OUT BECAUSE THEIR MEAGER MEAL WAS A LITTLE BETTER THAN WHAT THE LOCAL PEOPLE GOT. HE ALSO REPORTED A BIZARRE SITUATION IN ONE LOCALITY (NEAR BIYSK), WHERE PEOPLE LIVING ON ONE SIDE OF THE OB' RIVER ARE FORBIDDEN TO CROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE BECAUSE OF A SUSPECTED CASE OF CHOLERA FIVE YEARS AGO. IT SEEMS THAT NOBODY GOT AROUND TO RESCINDING THE ORIGINAL ORDER, WHICH CONTINUES TO BE ENFORCED. THE LOCAL FISHING INDUSTRY ON THE OB' HAS BEEN DESTROYED BECAUSE OF THE POLLUTION OF THE RIVER BY A HUGE CHEMICAL PLANT IN BARNAIL.

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5. GORIY OBLAST': ANOTHER SOVIET ACQUAINTANCE CLAIMS THAT "EXPLOSIONS AND OTHER STRANGE NOISES" CAN BE HEARD BY DAY AND NIGHT IN THE CITY OF GORKIY; SHE IS NOT SURPRISED THE AREA IS CLOSED TO FOREIGNERS. THERE IS ALMOST NOTHING TO BUY; NO MEAT SINCE LAST FALL, AND VERY FEW POTATOES. PEASANTS ARE USING BREAD TO FEED THE ANIMALS BECAUSE OF LACK OF FEED. LOCAL VILLAGES ARE HALF-EMPTY. COLLECTIVE FARMERS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN ISSUED PASSPORTS DREAM OF GOING INTO MILITARY SERVICE WHICH WOULD ENTITLE

THEM LATER TO RECEIVE PASSPORTS AND MOVE TO A CITY. IN ONE VILLAGE SHE VISITED, THE NEAREST WORKING CHURCH ARE ALL MILES AWAY. LIFE IS STARKLY PRIMITIVE, STRAIGHT OUT OF THE 19TH CENTURY. ON HOLY DAYS, PEOPLE GATHER WITH OFFERINGS AT THE TOMB OF A LOCAL SAINT NEAR AN ABANDONED CHURCH.

6. COMMENT. THESE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS RUGGEST THAT GRUMBLING ABOUT CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE MAY BE PARTICULARLY BITTER THIS SUMMER. WHILE THE PICTURE THAT EMERGES FROM THESE REPORTS IS BLEAK, ONE CANNOT OF COURSE GENERALIZE ABOUT THE RURAL USSR FROM OUR HANDFUL OF RUMORS. IN ANY CASE, EMBASSY TRAVELERS HAVE REPORTED ADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLIES IN MANY MAJOR SOVIET CITIES. AND RUMORS OF DISTURBANCES CAUSED BY FOOD SHORTAGES SEEM TO HAVE DIED DOWN. MATLOCK

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